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THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW.

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To us today the highest value of our gospels is in the testimony they bring us concerning the deeds, words, and character of our Lord Jesus. The ideas and purpose of the author, and even his personal identity, are to us matters of secondary consideration. Nevertheless it is far more than idle curiosity that impels us to discover all that we can concerning the specific purpose with which our evangelists severally wrote. To gain their point of view and read their books, as it were, through their eyes will certainly make them more significant and instructive to us. It is the aim of this paper to give some help toward such a reading of the first gospel. It is a study of the gospel itself, with a view to discovering from its own testimony what its point of view, aim, and plan are. External testimony, which can be best considered after the gospel itself has been studied, is not here discussed. As subsidiary to the search for the purpose and plan of the book, the evidence concerning the writer and the readers for whom he wrote must be examined.

I. THE AUTHOR.

Tradition, oft-repeated and undisputed in ancient times, and certainly not wholly wrong or lightly to be set aside now, attributes our gospel to the publican-apostle Matthew. This, however, for reasons already intimated, cannot serve as a postulate or starting point of our present study. What we seek is rather the testimony of the gospel itself—which never names its author; the title is a later addition—concerning not the name or identity of the writer, but his characteristics and point of view.

1. *His nationality*.—Several classes of facts bear convergent

testimony indicating that the writer of the gospel is a Palestinian Jew.

a. Thus he shows himself familiar with the geography of Palestine. See, for example, 2 : 1, Bethlehem of Judea, distinguished from Bethlehem in the tribe of Zebulun ; 2 : 23, "a city called Nazareth," a phrase which at first suggests that the place is unfamiliar to the writer and his readers, but is probably intended to call attention to the name and its relation to the reference about to be made to the Old Testament ; 3 : 1, "the wilderness of Judea ;"¹ 3 : 5, the circuit of the Jordan (*cf.* Gen. 13 : 10) ; 3 : 13, Galilee and the Jordan ; 4 : 12, 13, Nazareth and Capernaum, and the relation of these to the ancient tribal boundaries ; 4 : 23-25, Galilee and the lands adjacent ; 8 : 5, 23, 28, the country of the Gadarenes² placed on the opposite side of the Sea of Galilee

¹ Some have found in this expression an inaccurate use of terms, perhaps betraying ignorance of the region. In Judg. 1 : 16 the wilderness of Judah is spoken of as being in the south of Arad. Arad is located by Robinson (*Bib. Res.*, II, 101) and others (*Dict. Bib.*) about sixteen miles south of Hebron. But in Josh. 15 : 61 f. Judah's territory is said to include "in the wilderness" Beth-arabah, Middin, and Secacah. Now Beth-arabah is also mentioned as belonging to Benjamin (Josh. 18 : 22), which indicates that the border between Judah and Benjamin ran through it. The exact site of Beth-arabah is unknown, but the location of the border line is approximately shown by being defined in Josh. 18 : 19 as drawn from the head of the Dead Sea, and as passing through Beth-hoglah, a town which is in the Jordan valley, about two miles north of the sea. This indicates that the wilderness of Judah extended as far north as the head of the Dead Sea, or a little further. But the region north of this was also desert (see Jos., *B. J.*, III, 10, 7, *fin.*; *cf.* IV, 8, 2; *cf.* also Mark 1 : 4, 5, which indicates that the Jordan ran through the wilderness), and when the boundary between Judah and Benjamin was no longer marked, and the territory of both tribes included in Judea, as was the case in New Testament times, it is very probable that the term wilderness of Judea would cover both the desolate region west of the Dead Sea and so much of the barren region north of the sea as lay within Judea. It must be observed that Matthew does not necessarily include any portion of the Jordan valley in the wilderness of Judea. (*Cf.* 3 : 1, 5, 6.) His language would be consistent with an intention to represent John's preaching as beginning in the wilderness of Judea, and as being transferred to the Jordan valley when he began to baptize (*cf.* again Mark 1 : 4, 5, which uses the term wilderness without the addition of Judea). But it is, perhaps, more probable that he intended the term wilderness of Judea to cover both regions.

² The phenomena presented by Matt. 8 : 28 and the parallel passages, Mark 5 : 1; Luke 8 : 26, have not been explained in a wholly satisfactory way. In each of the gospels there is manuscript authority for all three readings—Gadarenes, Gerasenes, Gergesenes. The revisers follow Westcott and Hort in adopting Gadarenes in

from Capernaum ; 14 : 34, Gennesaret on the Sea of Galilee ; 15 : 21, Tyre and Sidon ; 15 : 39, Magadan, though this cannot be certainly identified today ; 16 : 13 ; 17 : 1, Cæsarea Philippi, and the high mountain in that vicinity ; 19 : 1, Judea beyond Jordan ; 20 : 29, Jericho ; 21 : 1, Bethphage (not certainly identified), and the Mount of Olives (*cf.* 24 : 3) near Jerusalem ; 21 : 17 ; 26 : 6, Bethany. It must be remembered, of course, that these references may be in part derived from a documentary source employed by the writer—many of them are found also in Mark—and that all of them are possible to one who was not himself a Palestinian ; yet as part of a cumulative argument they are not without value.

b. The author is familiar with Jewish history, customs, and classes of people, and with Jewish ideas. Thus in 1 : 18 f. he shows his acquaintance with the fact that betrothal could be annulled only by divorce ; 2 : 4, with the position of the scribes, as those to whom a question about the doctrine of the Messiah would be referred ; 2 : 1, with the reign of Herod the Great ;

Matthew, Gerasenes in Mark, and Gerasenes (marg. Gergesenes, with Tisch.) in Luke. The conditions of the narrative are fulfilled on the eastern shore, near a town called Khersa or Gersa, situated on the left bank of the Wady Semakh ; the ancient name of this town may have been Gergesa (*Origen*, IV, 140, apparently referring to this site, gives Gergesa as the name), or possibly Gerasa (the frequency of the name Jerash today—CONDER in *Dict. Bib.*, Rev. Eng. Ed., I, 1162—suggests that Gerasa was a common name in ancient times). It is doubtless to this place that the names Gerasenes and Gergesenes refer ; the former can in any case scarcely refer to the well-known Gerasa, thirty-five miles distant from the lake. The reading Gadarenes, it should be observed, does not involve the statement that the event took place at Gadara, which, lying six miles from the lake and south of the Jarmuk, is an impossible site, but in the country of the Gadarenes, *i. e.*, in the district attached to Gadara. This district, called Gadarititis by Josephus (*B. J.*, III, 10, 10 ; *cf.* III, 3, 1) is proved by coins to have extended to the Sea of Galilee (SCHÜRER, Div. II, Vol. I, p. 104), but does not seem to have included the site of Khersa, since Hippos with its district lies between them (*Pal. Exp. Fund Quarterly*, 1887, pp. 36 ff. ; SMITH, *Hist. Geog.*, p. 459). If, therefore, Matthew wrote Gadarenes, it must have been either with the intention of assigning the event to the southeastern shore of the sea, where, however, there is said to be no site fulfilling the conditions (WILSON in *Dict. Bib.*, Rev. Eng. Ed., I, 1099), or as a loose and general designation of the country along the southern half of the eastern shore, although the particular site belonged to the district of Hippos or to Gaulanitis, rather than to Gadarititis. In either case the reading Gadarenes, while it may indicate ignorance of the exact location of the event, shows at least general acquaintance with the geography of the region adjacent to the Sea of Galilee.

2 : 22, with the fact that Archelaus succeeded him in Judea, but not in Galilee, and with the reputation of Archelaus for cruelty;³ 14 : 1, with the title of Herod Antipas, tetrarch⁴ of Galilee; 26 : 3, 57, with the name of the high priest; 26 : 59, with the existence and character of the Sanhedrin; 27 : 2, 11, 13, with the relation of the Jewish to the Roman authorities, and with the name of the Roman procurator. Here, also, though no single item of the evidence is decisive, the whole is not without significance.

c. The writer is familiar with the Old Testament, and believes in it as a book containing divinely given prophecies. The first section of the book, with its title characterizing Christ as son of David and son of Abraham, and the genealogical table partly taken from the Old Testament, and designed to prove the descent of Jesus from David and Abraham, as in accordance with prophecy the Messiah must be, show both a familiarity with the Old Testament and a thoroughly Jewish way of looking at it. The structure of this table itself points in the same direction, showing that it is, to the writer, a matter of interest, if not also of argument, that the generations from Abraham to Moses are (by virtue of slight omissions and double counting) divisible into three groups of fourteen (twice seven) generations, a fact which suggests that the Messiah appeared at an appropriate time, at the end of three periods, the culmination of each of the two preceding of which had been marked by a great event of Jewish history. Throughout the gospel, but especially in the early and the later parts, he calls attention to passages of the Old Testament which he interprets as finding their fulfilment in events of Jesus' life (1 : 22 f.; 2 : 6, 15, 17 f., 23; 4 : 14-16; 8 : 17; 12 : 17-21; 13 : 35; 21 : 4 f.; 27 : 9). These

³ There is a noticeable difference between Matthew's references to the political situation of Palestine and Luke's. Luke speaks with the air of painstaking investigation; Matthew with that of easy familiarity, all the more noteworthy that the frequent and somewhat complicated succession of rulers would have made error easy.

⁴ Mark 6 : 14 is less exact, since Herod was not, strictly speaking, king.

In 14 : 3, it has been alleged, Matthew wrongly designates the brother of Herod whose wife he had married as Philip, whereas Philip was really the husband of Salome; but it is by no means certain that there is an error here. Cf. Mark 6 : 17 and commentaries on both passages.

eleven passages, most of them introduced by the formula, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet," sometimes with the insertion of the phrase "by the Lord," are a marked feature of this gospel. They are a special contribution of this evangelist, having no parallel passages in Mark or Luke.⁵ Nor, with the exception of Mark 1 : 2 and Luke 3 : 4 ff., parallel to Matt. 3 : 3, are there any similar passages in the other synoptic gospels. They show in the clearest way the author's special interest in the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament and in their fulfilment in Jesus; the conception of the Old Testament and the method of interpreting it which they reveal, though not impossible to a Gentile Christian as an acquisition from others, were certainly developed on Jewish soil. That we have, in this particular case, to do with a mind itself Jewish is placed almost beyond doubt by the fact that, though the quotations from the Old Testament which are common to our first three gospels, nearly all of which occur in the words of Jesus, show a predominant influence of the Greek version of the Old Testament, this group of eleven peculiar to the first evangelist clearly shows a predominant influence of the original Hebrew.

d. In various other ways the writer betrays his Jewish feeling and point of view. He employs descriptive names derived from the Old Testament which would be unnatural in the mouth of any but a Jew, and which are, in fact, found nowhere else in the New Testament, save in the case of one phrase in the book of Revelation. See 2 : 20, 21, land of Israel; 4 : 5; 27 : 53, holy city; 5 : 35, city of the great king; 10 : 6; 15 : 24, lost sheep of the house of Israel. He speaks of the half-shekel tax which every adult male Jew paid annually for the support of the temple (*cf.* Ex. 30 : 13-16), simply by the name of the coin that paid it, the two-drachma piece, following in this a usage probably common among the Jews.⁶ His tone in speaking of Gentiles (5 : 47; 6 : 7; 6 : 32; 18 : 17) is decidedly Jewish, the name

⁵ Nor in John, save that 21 : 4 f. is paralleled in John 12 : 14 f., and 8 : 17 partially in John 1 : 29. Matt. 4 : 16 has a partial parallel in Luke 1 : 79.

⁶ Concerning the variation in the amount of the tax, see Ex. 30 : 13; Neh. 10 : 32; concerning the ratio of the shekel and the drachma, and the coins in use in New Tes-

Gentile being evidently with him not simply a designation of nationality, but a characterization nearly equivalent to our modern term "heathen." He is particularly interested in those teachings of Jesus which were of special significance to the Jew and the Jewish Christian. Thus it is in this gospel only that we have Jesus' word concerning the permanence of the law (5:17-19); the Sermon on the Mount as given here preserves the comparison of Jesus' teaching with that of the Pharisees, and, indirectly, with that of the Old Testament (chaps. 5-7), an element wholly absent from the similar discourse in Luke (6:20-49); this gospel alone tells us that the personal mission of Jesus and the work of his apostles on their first separate mission tour were limited to the Jews (10:6; 15:24); it gives special emphasis to Jesus' denunciation of the Pharisees (15:13; 21:28-32; chap. 23), and is our only authority for the most striking of his sayings concerning the impending doom of the nation (8:11, 12; 21:43; 22:7, are found only in Matt.; *cf.*, also, 12:38-45; 23:35, 36; 24:2, of which there are parallels in Mark or Luke, and 27:25, peculiar to Matt.). Here are elements which seem at first sight contradictory, but they all bespeak an author specially concerned with the relations of the gospel to Judaism.

2. *His religious position.*—Evident as it is that our evangelist is a Jew by nationality and education, it is still more clear that he is a Christian—a Jew who, holding the Messianic hope of his people and believing that there were Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, finds that hope realized and those prophecies fulfilled in Jesus. Passages need hardly be cited. The first line of the gospel shows the author's position, and it appears throughout the book. The question whether he was also a Judaizing Christian believing in the permanent authority of the statute law of the Old Testament for both Jewish and Gentile Christian, or perhaps for the Jewish Christian but not for his Gentile brother, can be answered only on the basis of a study of the purpose of the book. (See § III.)

tament times, see MADDEN, *Coinage of the Jews*, pp. 296 f., 294; BENZINGER, *Hebräische Archäologie*, p. 193; SCHÜRER II, I, pp. 41, 250 f.; JOS., *Ant.*, III, 8. 2; XVIII, 8. 1.

II. THE READERS FOR WHOM THE BOOK WAS PRIMARILY INTENDED.

Much of the evidence bearing upon this question is derived from the same passages which have already been cited to show the nationality of the writer.

1. Not much stress can be laid on the writer's apparent assumption that his readers are familiar with Palestinian geography. The other gospels which on other grounds are shown to have been written specially for Gentiles apparently make the same assumption, or rather, perhaps, are equally unconcerned that their readers should understand their geographical references. There are even some passages in Matthew which seem to assume that his readers were not acquainted with the smaller Palestinian towns. In 2:23, indeed, the phrase "a city called Nazareth" is probably used simply to call attention to the name in anticipation of the next sentence, and in 4:13 a similar motive leads to the mention of the location of Capernaum; but the placing of the healing of the demoniacs in the country of the Gadarenes, if this be the correct reading, seems to imply that he could not assume that his readers would be acquainted with the little town Khersa, and, therefore, located the event more generally in the *country* of the Gadarenes, or else that he himself was unacquainted with the smaller place (*cf.* note 2). Beyond this the geographical evidence is purely negative.

2. Though a general acquaintance with Jewish customs and institutions on the part of the reader is assumed in all of the gospels, and hence does not of itself point to Jewish readers, yet the extent of this in the first gospel is worthy of notice. Compare, for example, Matthew's references to the Jewish rulers (2:1, 22; 14:1) with Luke's (2:1, 2; 3:1, 2), or his unexplained mention of the Jewish custom of ceremonial cleansing (15:2) with Mark's detailed explanation (7:3, 4). The seeming exception in 27:15 is not properly such. The custom of releasing a prisoner at the passover season, not otherwise known to us, was probably not of Jewish but of Roman origin, and since the government of Judea had changed several times in the generation or more between the death of Jesus and the writ-

ing of the gospel, it is probable that the custom had so long ago ceased that even to Jews it was a matter of unfamiliar history.

3. The number of argumentative quotations from the Old Testament introduced by the writer, and the almost total absence of such quotations from Mark and Luke—John has more than Mark and Luke, but fewer than Matthew—suggest also Jewish readers. It is certainly not decisive evidence, since arguments from Scripture early became the common property of Christians, both Jewish and Gentile. The extent and prominence of the Scripture argument count for something, but the decisive word must be said on the basis of the *nature* of the argument which this gospel founds on its quotations. (See § III.)

4. The use of Jewish descriptive titles (see the passages cited under I, 1, *d*), the reporting of the words of Jesus which emphasize his mission to the Jews (10:5, 6; 15:24), and of other teachings which would be of special interest to Jews (11:14; 12:5, 6; 17:24; 23:16–22—all peculiar to this gospel), and the fact that the great discourses of Jesus, notably the Sermon on the Mount (chaps. 5—7), are reported in a form adapted to Jewish thinking, are of more decisive significance, and all indicate that the writer has in mind mainly Jewish readers. Still more significant, though here also the full significance will appear only in relation to the purpose of the book, are the passages referred to above which foreshadow the downfall of Judaism; (8:11, 12; 12:38–45; 21:43; 22:1–14; 23:35, 36; 24:2; 27:25). The use of the term Gentiles as a designation of religion rather than of nationality (5:47, etc.) suggests the same thing, but is shown by 1 Cor. 5:1; 10:20; 12:2, to be possible in a writing addressed directly to Gentile Christians; its occurrence, therefore, tends only to indicate that the book was not intended for non-Christian Gentiles. The use of the term Jews (28:15) in the way so common in the fourth gospel is not only a mark of the Christian point of view of the Jewish writer, but tends in some degree to indicate that he wrote for those who, though Jews in nationality, now distinguished themselves from the rest of the nation by their Christianity.

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